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Hebblethwaite, THE OCEAN OF TRUTH: A DEFENCE OF OBJECTIVE THEISM

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revelation construed as a form of manifestation; thereby he deftly responds to the claims of philosophers like Locke and Flew who have argued that revelation presupposes some form of natural theology or its functional equivalent.

When at last we arrive at the communication model we are ready for it. The basic issue pursued is that of construing divine revelation as analogous to a situation where one person speaks to another person. Here Mavrodes takes up such topics as the place of propositions and promises in revelation, the place of *a priori* judgement in construing the content and media of revelation, the person-relative character of revelation, and the place of mediation in the transmission of revelation. The least convincing section of the whole book is a final section where he attempts to analyse a lengthy autobiographical claim of the late John Baillie, in which Baillie says that God had spoken to him through the narrative traditions of Israel, the church, and his own family.

Theologians are wont to complain that when philosophers write about divine revelation they invariably assume an uninformed and untenable reading of the biblical traditions, fuelled perhaps by their exposure to or engagement in conservative versions of the Christian faith. This is a legitimate complaint, and those who are looking for evidence of this charge will find some here, especially in chapter four. However, it would be otiose to make much of this complaint. The task that Mavrodes has set himself here does not depend upon this or that reading of the biblical texts. Nor are his arguments overturned by drawing attention to his theological pedigree. In fact his candour on the latter is refreshingly stated, and it in no way stifles his clarity or creativity. The great merit of this whole discussion is that it helps reopen a conversation on the concept of divine revelation which is long overdue. Mavrodes is at once restrained, candid, suggestive, rigorous, and illuminating. For example, the schemata deployed in chapter three to unveil the concept of revelation is a masterpiece of lucidity. Moreover, there are suggestive insights scattered throughout this volume which deserve extensive pondering. There is one astonishing lacuna. The idea of incarnation is mentioned only obliquely. It is passing strange that a philosopher of Mavrodes' skill and theological propensity can write a whole book on divine revelation without dealing at length with the place of divine incarnation in the logic of revelation. It is also surprising that there is no extended treatment of the relation between tradition and revelation, although the final section strays into the neighbourhood of this topic.

The Ocean of Truth: A Defence of Objective Theism, by **Brian Hebblethwaite**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Pp. 165. $34.50 (cloth), $11.95 (paper).

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The following quote (from pages 146-47) may appear to be a summation of

many of the grounds which the author has offered for the belief that God exists:

> An absolute, infinite, self-existing mind alone explains the contingency and yet the intelligibility of the universe. A personal will or intention alone explains the kind of order which the universe possesses [and] its capacity to evolve finite minds and the find tuning of its initial conditions, if ever that capacity was to be realised. A supremely good and beautiful ultimate reality behind all finite forms of existence alone explains the values we perceive on earth in such partial, temporary and fragile ways...[it explains], too, man's religious sense, his openness to the transcendent....And of course the reality and activity of God constitute the best explanation of the traditions of faith based on spiritual revelation."

But in fact this is *more* than a mere summation of the author's defense of theism. None of his original arguments, though they are expressed less succinctly, are much more rigorous than are the inferences contained in the quote, with the exception of the argument from "fine tuning"—the argument that contemporary big bang theory entails that, even given that *some* kind of universe would have resulted from *some* kind of big bang, the odds against there having been precisely the big bang which eventually gave rise to intelligent life, were astonishingly great. But none of the other arguments is in fact anything like as rigorous as, say, recent defenses of the ontological argument. And, even if the "fine tuning" argument is sound, it surely does not rigorously establish the existence of a supremely perfect being.

The author might wish to reply here that he is giving the best explanations which are available to us of the phenomena cited in the quote, and that, as a consequence, we should accept those explanations, regardless of the degree of rigor involved. It is, of course, the case that *some* explanations (say, "Possession by the devil accounts for her strange behaviour") are unacceptable, even if they are the best explanations available at a given time. But aren't the author's explanations such that reasonable people can disagree about their epistemic merit? (The author appears to think that they are more convincing than that. But here, I think, he is mistaken.)

An argument on behalf of a negative answer to the above question is as follows: "Since simplicity and predictive fruitfulness are criteria of a best explanation, the hypothesis that a demon, bent on deceiving us into believing falsely that theism is true, has as much epistemic merit as does the author's theistic explanations. It is, of course, the case that we are warranted in rejecting demon explanations *vis-a-vis* rival *scientific* explanations, but this is because the latter are more predictively-fruitful-cum-simple than the former, and, anyway, they do not posit intelligent beings as the ultimate source of what they explain, as do the author's explanations. It won't do for the author to object here that the demon explanation is inferior because a) it gives rise to an unanswerable question, *viz.*, 'What motivates the demon to deceive us?'

and b) we *can* answer the question, "What motivates God to create beauty, etc." simply by pointing out that God is perfectly good. For an equally plausible answer to the former question is available, namely, that the demon is thoroughly evil and, hence, is the ultimate cause of all false beliefs (and, perhaps, of suffering as well)."

However, if each of the two alternative explanations do in fact have some epistemic merit, then Jamesean prudence dictates that at least many of us should, for peace of mind, accept theism and reject the demon hypothesis.

Still, I think it unwise of the author to make (on page 143) the following, very strong claim about Alvin Plantinga's recent theistic epistemology:

> ...although belief in God may well be [properly?] basic in many peoples' belief systems, in the sense that, simply as a matter of fact, it is not for them the result of rational argument, it still remains vulnerable if denied rational support. It is too contentious a belief in the modern post-Enlightenment world...

For in so doing the author precludes his falling back on the Plantingaean thesis that phenomena such as religious experiences relate to belief in God, not as explicanda to best explicans, but as conditions of theistic belief which theists can properly take to be good reasons for theism, even though non-theists may not violate any epistemic duties in *not* so construing them. And I suspect that many epistemologists will think that Plantinga's weaker thesis is more plausible than the author's stronger one.

Nonetheless, he has given us an informative and thought-provoking book and one which I think accomplishes its chief aim of disproving the claim that well educated, modern Christians will, upon reflection, reject theism. (I should add that many of the articles in this journal show very clearly that the envisaged claim is false.)